

IN THE CLAIMS:

1. (Currently Amended) An image forming method comprising the steps of:

providing a print output by a nonsilver photographic color hard copy recording system;

providing a protective layer transfer sheet comprising a thermally transferable protective layer having a single or multi-layer structure separably provided on a substrate sheet formed of a 2 to 100  $\mu$ m-thick plastic film having a specular glossiness at 45 degrees of not more than 100%;

putting the print and the protective layer transfer sheet on top of each other and thermally transferring the protective layer onto an image in the print so as to cover at least the printed portion in the print; and

separating the substrate sheet from the protective layer transfer sheet.

2. (Original) The image forming method according to claim 1, wherein the nonsilver photographic color hard copy recording system is any one of an electrophotographic recording system, an

ink jet recording system, and a thermal transfer recording system.

3. (Original) The image forming method according to claim 1, wherein the protective layer transfer sheet comprises: a substrate sheet; and, stacked on the substrate sheet in the following order, a thermally transferable release layer having a single or multi-layer structure and a thermally transferable protective layer having a single or multi-layer structure.

4. (Original) The image forming method according to claim 1, wherein the protective layer transfer sheet comprises: a substrate sheet; and, stacked on the substrate sheet in the following order, a thermally transferable release layer having a single or multi-layer structure, a thermally transferable protective layer having a single or multi-layer structure, and a thermally transferable adhesive layer having a single or multi-layer structure.

5. and 6. (Canceled)

7. (Currently Amended) The An image forming method according to ~~claim 1~~ comprising the steps of:

providing a print output by a nonsilver photographic color hard copy recording system;

providing a protective layer transfer sheet comprising a thermally transferable protective layer having a single or multi-layer structure separably provided on a substrate sheet;

putting the print and the protective layer transfer sheet on top of each other and thermally transferring the protective layer onto an image in the print so as to cover at least the printed portion in the print; and

separating the substrate sheet from the protective layer transfer sheet, wherein the coverage of the whole layer to be transferred in the protective layer transfer sheet is 3 to 30 g/m<sup>2</sup>.

8. (Canceled)

9. (Currently Amended) The An image forming method according to ~~claim 8~~ comprising the steps of:

providing a print output by a nonsilver photographic color hard copy recording system;

providing a protective layer transfer sheet comprising a thermally transferable protective layer having a single or multi-layer structure separably provided on a substrate sheet;

putting the print and the protective layer transfer sheet on top of each other and thermally transferring the protective layer onto an image in the print so as to cover at least the printed portion in the print; and

separating the substrate sheet from the protective layer transfer sheet, wherein the material used in the thermally transferable protective layer is a thermoplastic resin has having a Tg value of 40 to 100°C and a storage modulus at 110°C of not more than  $1 \times 10^5$  Pa.

10. (Currently Amended) An image forming method comprising the steps of:

providing a protective layer transfer sheet comprising a thermally transferable protective layer having a single or multi-layer structure separably provided on a substrate sheet;

providing a print output by a nonsilver photographic color hard copy recording system;

putting the protective layer transfer sheet onto the print and thermally transferring the protective layer onto an image in the print so as to cover at least the printed portion; and

separating the substrate sheet from the protective layer transfer sheet,

the thermally transferable protective layer in the protective layer transfer sheet being composed mainly of a thermoplastic resin having a weight average molecular weight ( $M_w$ ) of not more than 20,000 and a number average molecular weight ( $M_n$ ) of not more than 10,000.

11. (Original) The image forming method according to claim 10, wherein the thermoplastic resin contains at least one member selected from the group consisting of polyester resins, epoxy resins, and phenoxy resins.

12. (Original) The image forming method according to claim 10, wherein the thermoplastic resin has a glass transition temperature of 40 to 80°C.

13. to 15. (Canceled)

16. (Original) The image forming method according to claim 10, wherein a release layer is further provided between the thermally transferable protective layer and the substrate film.

17. (Original) The image forming method according to claim 16, wherein the release layer is composed mainly of an acrylic resin having a number average molecular weight of not more than 40000.

18. (Original) The image forming method according to claim 10, wherein the thermally transferable protective layer contains an ultraviolet absorber.

19. to 28. (Canceled)

29. (Currently Amended) ~~The~~ An image forming method ~~according to claim 1,~~ comprising the steps of:

providing a print output by a nonsilver photographic color hard copy recording system;

providing a protective layer transfer sheet comprising a thermally transferable protective layer having a single or multi-layer structure separably provided on a substrate sheet;

putting the print and the protective layer transfer sheet on top of each other and thermally transferring by means of a thermal head the protective layer onto an image in the print so as to cover at least the printed portion in the print; and

separating the substrate sheet from the protective layer transfer sheet ~~wherein the thermally transferring step is carried out by means of a thermal head.~~

30. (Previously Presented) The image forming method according to claim 1, wherein the thermally transferring step is carried out by means of a heat roll.

31. (Previously Presented) The image forming method according to claim 1 , wherein the protective layer transfer sheet is used in a roll form.

32. (Previously Presented) The image forming method according to claim 1, wherein the protective layer transfer sheet is used in a separated sheet form.

33. (Previously Presented) The image forming method according to claim 32, wherein an assemblage comprising a mount and a protective layer transfer sheet secured on top of the mount is used.

34. (Previously Presented) The image forming method according to claim 33, wherein each size of the mount, the protective layer transfer sheet and the print satisfies the following relationship:

$$\text{Mount} \geq \text{Protective layer transfer sheet} \geq \text{Print}.$$

35. (Currently Amended) The An image forming method ~~according to claim 33,~~ comprising the steps of:

providing a print output by a nonsilver photographic color hard copy recording system;

providing a protective layer transfer sheet comprising a thermally transferable protective layer having a single or multi-layer structure separably provided on a substrate sheet;

putting the print and the protective layer transfer sheet on top of each other and thermally transferring by means of a thermal head the protective layer onto an image in the print so as to cover at least the printed portion in the print; and

separating the substrate sheet from the protective layer transfer sheet, wherein (1) the protective layer transfer sheet is used in a separate sheet form, (2) an assembly comprising a mount and a protective layer transfer sheet secured on top of the mount is used, and (3) a basis weight of the mount is in a range of 80 to 500 g/m<sup>2</sup>.